**Premier's TAFE Scholarships**

**New York Study Tour**

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TAFE NSW - Sydney Institute

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**Brief Description of Study Tour**

The proposed study was to look into ways to improve upon keys areas in the Sydney Institute’s Annual Plan, such as customer service and products.

The objective was to visit Businesses and Vocational Education Facilities implementing best practice, specifically; Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT), a government funded tertiary institution and Parsons- New School of Design, New York, a private tertiary institution, fashion retail outlets and design and manufacturing houses. My intention was to attend professional development classes at FIT, that were relevant to my work, to attend a series of seminars, fashion parades and exhibitions at both FIT and Parsons, hoping to develop strategic partnerships with the fashion industry internationally in order to share information between the organisations; build a student exchange programme, either in the physical or global electronic classroom; conduct market research into retail trends; investigate the design rooms workspace, particularly in regards to the use of Gerber systems; and enable a strengthening of Sydney Institute’s workforce capability in the area of fashion.

**Report of Findings from Institutional Visits**

[**Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT)**](http://www.fitnyc.edu/)

**Application Process**

F.I.T uses an online process for application and enrolment and processes between two and three thousand applications, from which four hundred are selected each semester into the Apparel Associate Degree. This process starts in the beginning of their junior year at high school, which is the equivalent of the year eleven in Australia. The entry requirements are an e-portfolio, a two hundred and fifty word essay and a grade point average of 2.5 (GPA), which they need to maintain for remainder of school year in order for an offer of place to remain open. The acceptances go out in March/April for a Fall intake.

**Course Structure**

Integrated subject delivery is very difficult, at FIT at this stage owing to high numbers of students and split annual intakes.

Competency based Certificate [comprising of 1twelve credits] programmes is offered over a three to four semester period in specialty areas such as:

* Computer technology
* Tailoring
* Draping
* Leather apparel

The Associate Degree (AAS) is a two-year course and is a pathway to the degree, which is a two year course. (BFA). Both levels require liberal arts subjects, such as English and Mathematics, plus one elective subject, to obtain Bachelor of Arts qualifications.

The semesters are fifteen weeks each. An average of sixteen hours per week is spent on fashion related subjects. Four hours per week spent on liberal arts subjects. Internships are a mandatory course requirement that see students attending the workplace one day a week for one semester during semester four.

During Semester five, everyone studies finished knitwear using Kaledo, computer programme and knitting machines.The machines used include German brand Stol equipment amongst others. They have bought some machines from businesses that were closing down, down scaling or upgrading machinery. Some machinery is leased.

Semester six students begin study in specialist areas. The various ‘Major’ choices offered include:

* Illustration in the fields of either commercial graphic art or fashion;
* Children’s wear
* Women’s contemporary daywear
* Sportswear
* Active wear
* Special occasion wear
* Tailoring
* Menswear
* Intimate apparel
* Finished knits
* Or accessories.

FIT is currently investigating adjusting delivery of courses to be more general and less specialized. Student feedback has been demanding a broader delivery of subject options, which would align it more closely with TAFE delivery.

*Fashion Illustration* and *Life Drawing* are taught as stand-alone subjects for the first semester of the associate degree, using live models for both subjects, after which illustration is then integrated into computer aided design (CAD) and general design classes. Only high-level students are invited to attend an advanced illustration ‘portfolio’ class which is partnered with ‘Design Collection: Visual Solutions’ in the second semester of 1st year. This allows for an advanced level of illustration and design skills to be developed in a small cohort. If the students select ‘Illustration as their major, they will not ‘realise’ their designs in the final two years of study.

Professor Sharon Rothman advises that when Sydney Institute develops the degree program developers should be discouraged from removing Fashion Illustration from the program, after first semester, because the standard of illustration has dropped at FIT since doing so.

High importance is placed on computer based learning, at FIT as ninety five per cent of jobs for graduates require expertise in ‘tech packs’. One subject is devoted to learning *Illustrator* and *Photoshop*, another to technical specification sheets and another to develop tech packs using Product Data Management (PDM) system by Gerber Technology. Computer aided patternmaking and grading is also taught to students via the School of Continuing and Professional Studies, using Gerber Technology.

BFA programme students receive eleven-twelve weeks time to realise one outfit for their final and major project. Critics or mentors are invited in to assist the students whilst the students are developing their product and to mark each student in their specialist areas. The fashion media are similarly invited to select garments for the parade, which is an annual, thirty-minute event for successful BFA students only and consists of 80-90 garments in total.

Textile design is a separate Diploma course and delivered by a separate department to the Fashion Apparel and Fashion Art Departments.

**Fees and Material Costs**

FIT is a government funded university. Annual tuition fees of $10 000, do not include material or boarding fees, which add approximately $10 000 to the overall costs. These fees can almost double for students from ‘out of state’.

Professional development and further studies courses vary, similar to our TAFE Plus or commercial courses in Australia but prices are kept affordable. For example $155 would provide four, three hour lessons for the computer class, ‘*Colour Matters’*,

**Competitions & Sponsorship**

Competitions are given priority atFIT. A liaison officer is provided with release from face to face hours to coordinate competitions. This allows for fuller student involvement in enriching competitions that raise the profile of the college and students.

**FIT Museum**

The FIT Museum supports design education and design school. It houses approximately three thousand garments in its classroom library and two and a half thousand for Exhibition use. The Museum classrooms and couture library of garments are made accessible to full time fashion students and they receive priority over part time classes and external visiting groups

**Assessment Rules**

Studio classes (practical classes) have standard rule, namely, should students miss three classes, they will automatically drop a grade. Should they miss four classes, they will be marked as having failed the course.

[**Parsons- The New School of Design**](http://www.newschool.edu/parsons/)

**Application Process and Course Information**

Parson School of Design is fee driven, which means the school accepts anyone who applies. Approximately 1500 students apply for first year; across two semester intakes; less apply in Spring Semester than Fall Semester.

There are four main ‘Design Major’ Programs on offer;

* Fashion Design
* Illustration
* Visual Communications
* Interior design.

Sciences and Liberal Arts degrees are also offered.

To obtain a Bachelor of Arts it is required to study one hundred and twenty credits, half of which need to be liberal arts or science subjects.

Associate Degree AAS is a two-year programme in Fashion Marketing and Merchandizing. In 2011, 300 students applied and were accepted into 1st year of program. The applicants tended to be adults wishing for a career change or advancement. The course can be completed in 2-3 Semesters.

Bachelor of Fashion Design BFA requires a four-year programme in Fashion Design.

In 2011, 800 students enrolled in first years fall intake with a further 700 in the spring intake. Applicants tend to be school leavers.

Approximately 400 to 500 freshmen will submit a portfolio to enter sophomore year as Fashion Design Majors/per semester.

Approximately 200 students complete BFA, each semester.

Only about 50 are fortunate enough to show work on the catwalk in Graduate Parade at the end of the college year. The parade showcases a capsule range designed and made by successful students – as occurs in TAFE practice in Australia.

Masters of Fashion Design MFA constitutes a two-year programme. 2012 was the inaugural year. 18 students graduated.

**Fees and Material costs**

The Bachelor degree tuition amounts approximately $33 500 per annum. Materials and accommodation costs extra.

**General Information**

The first year of study provides generic foundation year and is known as the freshman year. The focus is on creative thinking, drawing and design subjects. At end of year the students submit portfolio to their selected ‘Major’, which is a ‘soft selection’, in that, everyone is accepted.

The second year of study, known as the sophomore year, students start to develop skills in their specialist area of design.

The Vice President (Provos) of the School is an Australian - bringing the experience and expertise of an Australian educational context and skill set.

Yvonne Watson – Director of Academic Affairs has brought experience and philosophies from Great Britain. She has also cited Australia as having sound and forward thinking pedagogy.

These factors have been influential in remodelling the current course from a vocational skill driven course that integrates design with technical skills and is holistic in its approach to course delivery. This includes, students being given the opportunity to generate and develop their own designs, in the design studio then follow through design into the practical technology classes. These replace the basic cut and sew exercises; which can disengage students and reduce their motivation.

As yet there is no tracking of student outcomes on leaving Parsons School

**Commonalities of FIT and Parsons**

Both schools offer very well attended pre-college design courses; running as full Saturdays courses during school term or full time holiday programs. These courses are in high demand because art and design is not taught in high schools.

Whilst both schools place high importance of getting a balance between design and technology methodologies; Parsons has a slightly stronger emphasis and perceived strength in the area of design, whereas FIT has a stronger emphasis on technology and expect students to be a lot more self-directed in achieving design outcomes.

Art and design history is an integral part of the degree at all stages of the BFA course; not a single year of study as it currently exists at Sydney Institute.

Textile design is a separate course to Fashion design; it is not integrated into the course as it currently exists at Sydney institute.

**Conclusions and Recommendations**

Overall Sydney Institute is delivering current and relevant courses in the area of Fashion that reflect, in many ways, practice in the New York design institutes and use techniques such as ‘Capstone’ assessment style. However, there is room for improvements, in the following areas:

The Application Process to design courses at TAFE needs to be addressed to create user friendly, widely accessible and environmentally sustainable process.

This process could be online with portfolios being submitted as ‘e-portfolios’, which is environmentally more sustainable plus it is more accessible and inclusive for our NSW applicants, who may live in remote areas.

It would be advisable to introduce an earlier timeline for applications and closing dates to avoid clashes with Higher School Certificate demands and pressures, thus making the course offerings more accessible and appealing to potential students.

These suggested improvements, will also help avoid overloading teachers with end of year marking, parades and exhibitions.

Studio classes (practical classes) have mandatory attendance in the United States because they recognise that in practical classes students have to be in the classroom to see demonstrations, be shown techniques plus receive tuition and guidance from the facilitator whilst doing the activity, in order to learn the skills required to achieve competency.

The current TAFE NSW policy does not take this into account; an adjustment would disallow students from nonattendance at classes which invariably leads to poor results, withdrawal or Not Yet Competent grades.

If TAFE NSW seeks to produce high quality graduates and increase the course completion rates, then policy ought to be adjusted to take into account the differing needs of practical studio classes, as opposed to theory classes, in Fashion courses.

In addition, TAFE NSW could adopt the US Model for a 15 week term to allow teachers time to complete ever increasing administration tasks, such as validation, recording of evidence, completion coordination and so on.

TAFE NSW could also introduce more dynamic delivery methods in Fashion Illustration, by using ‘live models’. I, myself, experienced the benefits of the teaching technique whilst attending advanced fashion Illustration classes at FIT

* + - 1. It is 100 per cent better than current technique of using photographic images, for human figure and fabric qualities images because these are ambiguous. Live model visual information, on the other hand, is clear and immediate
      2. Moreover, the lecturer has control of the poses and the garments being worn, which result in a greater variety of pose options for students to draw and encourages students to learn quick illustration techniques, which are crucial in industry, for a variety of reasons.

I would suggest a greater variety of computer programs be offered to students such as ‘Colour Matters’, a user-friendly version of ‘Illustrator’ and ‘Photoshop’. John Shao the President of JSE Sweater Factory/Birch Fashion INC purchased the product after attending the same short course, using ‘Colour Matters’**.**

We can make the delivery of History and Culture of Fashion dynamicby getting access to a library of designer labels for history of costume classes, which would allow the subject to ‘come alive’. The importance of these suggested changes became instantly obvious as I experienced it first hand as a student at FIT.

It is suggested that TAFE NSW would benefit from the investment in a ‘competitions coordinator’ -within fashion teaching section- who can promote existing competitions and also develop new and exciting opportunities for TAFE NSW students to participate. Outcomes such as internships, editorial exposure, exchange programmes and prize money are excellent incentives. This can be implemented by allowing release hours for an existing teacher to invest time and energy to this task.

As a general rule Australia follows US lead, which means that our industry here in Australia can only become stronger in the market area of product development and merchandizing.

Thus, this approach to business, designing and working really needs to be built into the core subjects in our courses, by including exercises such as designing from ‘best sellers’ frequently to get students proficient in this area; Use ‘real’ product for class exercises, along with the 5 Rs RULE: recolour, refabricate, restyle, reprice, re-do; getting subscription to colour forecasting agency ‘Donega’; organising regular excursions to a trend forecast agencies and textile studios; including more ‘shopping/research excursions’ into classes with students using suggested ‘tool kit’ and pre-organised talks from sales assistants or managers to inform students of the type of sales information that they gather and report to designers; ensuring that in Marketing and Designing classes, students study the successful brands in the global market place, observe and decipher what the ‘concepts’ are in use and their points of difference, as highlighted by successful stores such as ‘Anthropologie’, and build capacity to exercise clever business acumen displayed by stores such as ‘Zara’.

My industry visits, to Polo, Ralph Lauren, Theory, Helmut Laing, Alice + Olivia, Accurate Patterns, and design schools, highlighted the need to make sure that our students are proficient in all areas of Gerber Technology- particularly in product data management (PDM) and the new product lifecycle management (PLM) programs because these are what our students will be using on entering the workforce. This will require the upgrade of software from our Gerber Technology Partner here in Australia, which will be available here early in 2013

We also need to prepare our students for the growing demand in the fashion industry as patternmakers and machinists. There is currently a skills shortage in these areas in USA due to production being brought back ‘on-shore’, and therefore it follows that this trend will be seen soon here in Australia.

This preparation could occur in the existing course, during their work placement or through extra commercial courses to deliver specific skills required in these areas. Extra short courses could also target the area of menswear due to strong signs of growth in this area.

**Proposed Projects**

* **An international online design competition** with FIT students. I will be seeking International sponsorship from the Australian and US Consulates to enable a winning student from each respective country to partake in a short exchange programme. Preliminary discussions have already taken place with Professor Mary Wilson of FIT
* **A Study Tour**- which will see a group of Sydney Institute students travelling to New York to participate in formal lessons at FIT; Industry visits to design studios, contractors of patternmaking, grading and sample machinists, ‘Donega’ a Trend Forecast Studio; textiles and trims wholesalers and retailers; museums and guided market research in the retail districts. A formal proposal has already been written and submitted to the Faculty to be submitted to the Minister for Education via the VET Outbound Mobility Program (VET) 2013 Project Application
* **A series of professional development seminars from visiting professors from FIT**, to be held here at Sydney Institute, presenting workshops and lectures in the area of Advanced Fashion Illustration, with Professor Steven Broadway and Trend Research, Merchandizing, with Professor Bob Shultz. Support from the St George College Director, Russell Scott has been obtained with more discussions to be had to determine the best way forward in bring them out to Australia. ‘Online’ presentations are an option to be investigated - as a cheaper alternative.
* **Establishing ‘access’ to a collection of an historical couture collection** to be made available to the students in the classroom, to supplement a planned online delivery of the history of fashion; allowing it to come ‘alive’. Initial contact has been made and Charlotte Smith, who is keen to see the program in operation.
* **International Internship opportunity**; one ‘paid’ and one ‘unpaid internship’, with ‘Polo Ralph Lauren’. Initial discussions had with Teresa Corbo of Polo Ralph Lauren whilst visiting the ‘Polo’ head office on Broadway New York. Successful students would require a ‘student visa’ in order for this to take place. Further discussions to be had to organize details.

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